

THE
CHALLENGE
TO
LIBERTY



VISCOUNT
HALIFAX



Handwritten: Handwritten:

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

An Address by
VISCOUNT HALIFAX
K.C., D.C.L.

*Chancellor of the University of Oxford
Foreign Secretary to His Majesty's Government
Viceroy and Governor-General of India, 1935-41*

LIBRARY OF THE	UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
DATE	_____
BY	_____

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
1940

NOTE

THIS ADDRESS WAS given to the University of Oxford in the Sheldonian Theatre on 27 Feb. 1940, and has been reprinted by *The Times* under the title *A Conflict of Youth*

Printed in India for the Clarendon Press and published by Humphrey Milford

THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS *Head Office, Bodley*
LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO
MELBOURNE CAIRO BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS
HUMPHREY MILFORD *Publisher to the University*

श्री महादेव देसाई कृपाकर

क्रमांक 1034

SP 56

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

IN addressing you, members of Oxford University, I suppose that I assume in your eyes a dual personality—that of Chancellor of the University and of Foreign Secretary. This evening I propose to perform the feat, if indeed it is a feat, of welding this dual personality into one and speaking to you in all sincerity with single heart and mind. One of my predecessors, Lord Grey of Fallodon, in whose steps I should be proud to walk, combined, though not like Lord Curzon simultaneously, the two offices with which I am today entrusted. It was only after Lord Grey had retired from a public life, which did honour to his country and to himself, that his University welcomed him back as Chancellor. I can imagine no better representative of our University, and I would that he were here now to speak to you in my place.

Lord Grey hated war. He did his utmost, in and before 1914, to avoid war with Germany, just as we, his successors, did our utmost to avoid war with Germany in 1939. When in spite of his efforts war came in the summer of 1914, Lord Grey, standing at the window of his

room in the Foreign Office, used words which you will remember, but which you will allow me once again to quote, since they were so remarkable a forecast of what has happened since. 'The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.'

The similarity between 1914 and 1939 or 1940 is striking. We too hate war. We also observe, with deepening anxiety, the growing darkness in Europe. Our attitude towards those instruments of force to which we are compelled to have resort in defence of the highest things for which and by which we live; our views about war; both these are unchanged. Nevertheless, I should be misleading myself and you if I were to suggest that there is no difference between the position in 1914 and the position as you see it today. The emotional experience of one generation must of necessity differ from that of the generation which preceded it. In 1939 I and others of my age could without much difficulty recapture that earlier experience of 1914, but I know that I should be profoundly mistaken if I were to imagine that the youth of today were entering upon this second European war in the same mood as that in which we entered upon the

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

first. I will attempt to explain to you where, as it appears to me, lies the difference.

It is not only that now we know better what war means, and that the temper in which we face it is rather one of set determination than any feeling of approach to a great and unknown adventure. We in 1914 had been born and grown up in an atmosphere of peace. Those who came up to Oxford with me lived in a world that we then thought was stable and secure. That security was rudely shaken in 1914, but not sufficiently shaken for us to have any serious doubt that it would soon be put right or to think that when the war was over the old life would not return. You, in the light of what has happened since, may think that we were foolish and short-sighted. Perhaps we were. But every generation must, *sub specie æternitatis*, be foolish and short-sighted, and you no doubt hold your own views about your elders. What exactly these views are I do not pretend to know, but I suspect that you see us as people who, though no doubt well-meaning, have made havoc of the world in which you now have to live. You probably regard us as having lived through, and perhaps as still living

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

in, the years of illusion, while you have lived through the years of disillusion. I fancy that to us patriotism presented itself in simpler and more straightforward form than it does to you, and that for this reason the same appeals which moved us no longer have the same power with you. The poetry of Rupert Brooke which rightly inspired us has been replaced on your shelves by that of other poets of your own times, who bring you a harsher message. We were sure, as I say, in 1914 that once we had dealt with the matter in hand the world would return to old ways, which, in the main, we thought to be good ways. You are not so sure. I admit and sympathize with the difference, but having made the admission let me add this. No generation has the right to lay the cause of all its ills upon the shoulders of its predecessor, for no one age-group of men has the monopoly of vision. We are all men and women of our particular time and particular environment. We are all subject to the limitations of human weakness and fallibility. Just as you may criticize us, those who come after will no less certainly criticize you.

I have quoted to you some words of Lord

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

Grey which have proved indeed prophetic. Let me quote also some words which were written by a French Jansenist in the seventeenth century and which are very similar:

'I have the feeling that I was born in a church illuminated by many lamps and many torches, and that God suffers me to see them go out one after the other, apparently without any fresh lights taking their place. Thus the air seems to grow gradually darker, because we are not worthy that God should restore to his church that which he has himself removed.'

You may perhaps find in these words deeper analysis of the present ills of Europe. You may think that Western culture is falling into darkness because it deserves no better fate. You may think indeed that these times earn the title of one of the most remarkable poems of our day, and conclude that Europe is indeed 'the waste land'. I would go some long way with you in agreement with this judgement. I think that the existence of war in Europe today is a sign of failure, or of something more than failure, in our Western civilization. When I consider that we—who hate war—are driven to the use of force; that you are asked to be the instruments of this force, in maintaining against bitter and evil

श्री महादेव देवाय प्रणाम्य

कर्मणि

कर्मणि

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

attack the first principles upon which European life has hitherto been based, the darkness that hangs over Europe seems to me something which Milton might have described as darkness visible. Moreover, I am appalled—there is no easier word for it—by one fact above all. This ‘waste land’ in which we live, this European civilization in which the lamps are burning dim, has not been brought to its present pass merely by the mistakes, the pride, and the selfishness of an older generation.

What has, for example, been the driving force behind the Nazi movement in Germany? It has been German youth. Deliberately deprived as they have been of the elements of true judgment, it is they who made the movement and who still sustain it. Their point of view stands in stark opposition to yours. They do not understand your way of thinking. Your ideals mean nothing to them. They have their own ideals, which to our minds are distorted and deformed, but for which hundreds of thousands of them are prepared without a moment’s hesitation to sacrifice their lives. There is what seems an impenetrable barrier dividing you from them, which somehow will have to be broken down if the

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

youth of Europe is to avoid living always in this waste land; and if the European temple of civilization is to deserve and win a rekindling of the lamps.

The real conflict, therefore, today is not between age and youth, but between youth and youth. It is important that this should be fully appreciated, for it is the kernel of our future problems. I am not disquieted by the divergences between age and youth. They have been with us since the world began. They represent an inevitable difference of perspective, but there is nothing in them which postulates a fundamental conflict. If I were to see life as you see it, or if you were to see it as I do, I should feel that there was something wrong with one or other of us. But there is something sinister in the acceptance by the growing generations in different countries of standards of conduct in sharp contradiction to one another, for that does constitute a terrifying challenge to the very foundations of human thought and action.

But in this challenge also lies our hope: for as we move to meet it, we shall more truly measure both its nature and the weapons with which it can be countered. It was easier a

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

century ago to run away from the truth than it is today, less difficult to avoid looking squarely at grim and dangerous facts. In Victorian times there was much to encourage the assurance in the steady improvement of man's lot that generally prevailed. Major European wars were rare, and when they occurred they were according to modern standards brief. Their scale in any case was not such as to disturb the whole frame of national life. Human comprehension and knowledge were extended in both spiritual and material spheres; the arts and sciences flourished; man's social sense was awake and active; there was a growing respect for the rights of the individual, for freedom of speech and conscience; there was an insistent demand that all men should enjoy equality of opportunity. Ignoring the precarious nature of all human progress, it was too lightly assumed that the good things thus reflected in our attitude to our fellow men had come to stay and that the clock would not be put back. I sometimes picture the Victorian, who had lived and died in the comfortable and comforting belief that we were marching in orderly fashion 'from precedent to precedent', returning to life

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

today. He would be astounded no doubt by the material conveniences with which we had added to the ease of life, but he would be still more astounded by the moral retrogression of Europe and this devastating perversion of youth in Germany.

Do not let me overstate the case. I am far from thinking that the wounds inflicted on our civilization need be mortal. But I do think that we are fighting for its life; and inasmuch as that life finally depends upon the ideals that inspire it, I think we have no choice but to resist and defeat by force the attack to which those ideals—yours as well as mine—are now exposed.

I know that it is said by men of high principle that force in itself, if not an evil thing, has a value only negative. I think this is an exaggeration. Most true it is that force cannot of itself exorcize the evil spirits that enter and deprave the hearts of men. But when these evil spirits invoke force for the prosecution of their purpose, and the struggle is thus joined in the physical arena, it is only by force on the battle-ground thus chosen that the evil can be resisted. Nor can I doubt that if under what I

श्री महादेव देवाः प्रणामम्

कर्मिक

वर्गिक

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

must hold to be a one-sided and mistaken interpretation of our Lord's teaching we refrain on principle from replying in kind to the use of force, we may be surrendering to extinction the most sacred causes for which we stand to posterity as guardians and trustees. Thus force, by resisting the destructive power of evil and guarding the field in which good can work, can render positive service which can be given in no other way. As I see this problem which is today so tragically forced upon our thought, it is the spiritual motive, alike in national as in individual action, on which judgement has to be passed. Always it is the spirit behind the application of force which makes or mars its value. And we may assuredly hope that the same spirit, which gives the physical and moral courage to defend the menaced values of life today, will avail us when we come through the valley of dark decision to the work of reconstruction.

Here I come back again to the idea of 'the waste land'. I do not believe, as I have said, that civilization has yet foundered, but I am certain that there is an active force of evil which, unless we fight it, will rapidly reduce our

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

civilization to a desert of the soul. That evil force is at work in a period of human history in which change has been so sudden as to bring grave confusion of thought to give more favourable conditions for the Devil's work. It is, of course, true that the world never stands still, but there are times when the flywheel races, and you and I live in such a time today. You have never lived in any other. Your world has been influenced, whether you acknowledge it or not, by what I must take leave to term the inhuman conception of the so-called economic man. There has been a tendency for great thinkers, who have analysed the social and moral values on which the human community has been built, to stress the need for finding the perfect system. There has been a tendency to explain all history and humanity in economic instead of in human terms. Christianity, on the other hand, has rather made its end the perfection of the individual, in the conviction that here, too, lay the secret of life for all society. And this emphasis upon the ideal system, instead of the ideal individual, has not helped the development of the human character. Yet fundamentally men today remain much the

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

same men as they were yesterday. They may be better informed, but they are not necessarily wiser. They wish to emancipate themselves from artificial conventions, but they are not more free from the dangers and pitfalls which caused those conventions to be accepted.

We none of us, young or old, like to be called conventional. Such a description seems in some way to impugn our intellectual fibre and independence. And so, desiring to assert our independence, we are tempted to revolt against canons which reason has not yet made our own, regardless of the fact that some of them at least may have permanent significance. One consequence is that in many quarters today there is failure to distinguish between the necessary revision of conventions, which must inevitably recur in any intelligent community, and the recognition of the necessity for some rules, which if you like you may call conventions, for the guidance and protection of society. Here is indeed one of life's problems which each has to settle for himself, finding his own adjustment between the necessity for change which is the law of life and the restraint without which society cannot live. T. H. Green

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

once said: 'That man is free who is conscious of himself as the author of the law which he obeys.' Conventions are after all but the warning signals of society which has from the beginning of history felt the need of protecting human frailty.

The substance of any conventional code, however, must derive from the appreciation by society of the principles of its own survival. These in turn emerge from moral principles which man has gradually come to apprehend, and which themselves are rooted in religious instinct. The danger that in revising traditional and outward forms we impair the substance is familiar enough. If this happens, man is adrift without bearings and without anchor; and, as we see today, in the vile savageries to which in this twentieth century he can revert, the descent from man to animal is easy.

And so it is that if we are to keep our bearings as a nation we must base ourselves firmly on social, moral, and religious standards. No country will be at peace with itself or with others on any other basis, for the world's disorder today is the reflection of turmoil and conflict in the minds of men. If, therefore, we

श्री महादेव देसाई संस्थापक

सचिव

सर्गाई

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

are to recapture the secret of order for international society—and here I speak of all countries—we must as individuals strive to erect or maintain standards that will bring true freedom through the way of discipline. Your standards will not perhaps be the same in form as those to which the loyalty of those older than yourselves are pledged. But in substance I fancy they will not greatly differ. That however, is something which you must work out for yourselves, answering directly your own needs. And Oxford, much as she may have changed, still retains her essential quality as the great clearing-house of ideals and ideas, where values may be tested and appraised in the free play of thought. Oxford will still mould you as you are assuredly moulding her; and in this double process I do not doubt that she will remain the inspiration of a vital part of English life.

Many of you, perhaps most of you, are preparing to take your place before long in the ranks of the fighting forces, and you have every right to put the question, 'What is it that we are to fight for, and what prospect is there that we shall in the end secure the better world for

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

which the fight is waged?' I have done my best here and elsewhere—as have others—to weigh what is involved in the present conflict. Its issue, as I believe, will affect profoundly the whole future of mankind, for what is here at stake is whether the nations that desire peace must perpetually be faced with war, if they are not prepared to accept any settlement that force may seek to impose upon them. And so, except for those—a tiny fraction of our people—who would for whatever reason feel that we had been wrong to embark upon this war at all, I cannot conceive of doubt arising as to the duty of bracing our resolution until, so far as it may be humanly possible to do so, we have secured the world against a repetition of this ordeal.

As to the future, it is not possible for me or for any other man to answer with complete assurance. If once the doctrine of force could effectively be put to shame, the way would be open to concentrate the effort now mobilized for war upon the cause of improving the common lot of man. Some months ago before the war I said that 'British policy rested upon twin foundations of purpose. One was

determination to resist force. The other was our recognition of the world's desire to get on with the constructive work of building peace.' The implication of those words holds good today. To none of us is vouchsafed certainty as to what it may be in our power to do, and, were I to attempt to make such claim, you would rightly challenge my presumption. But what *is* within our power is to define clearly our direction and the spirit in which we shall try to work. If this and the purposes for which we strive are right, we can surely feel that we have done everything we can to make our endeavour worthy of the cost.

I constantly remember the story of the traveller who asked the peasant working in the fields how far it was to Carcassonne. 'How far it is to Carcassonne, Sir, that I do not know. But that this is the road to Carcassonne, of that I am sure; for those who return say always that at the end lies Carcassonne.' Our Carcassonne is the world of our desire. I do not know whether it will be an easier world, but what matters is that we should desire not an easier but a better world, and equip ourselves in body, mind, and spirit to create it. For it depends mainly on ourselves whether we are to be masters of our fate.

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

There is no reason, therefore, to be disillusioned about the future, however much you may feel disillusioned about the past. Hope is the oldest and wisest counsellor of mankind, for without hope it is impossible for men to apprehend the power of the other great Christian virtues of faith and charity, and these alone can be the bond of peace for all members of the human family.

I have said that the real conflict of ideas is between youth and youth, and that the beliefs of German youth, nurtured in Nazi doctrines, are in stark opposition to your own. We should gravely err if we were to rate lightly the strength and reality of their beliefs. The racial doctrine, as interpreted in the Nazi creed, may be, and in my view is, sheer primitive nonsense; and we are no more prepared to admit German superiority of race than we are concerned to assert our own. If that were all, it would not greatly matter, but when this doctrine is invoked in justification of the oppression of other races, it becomes a crime against humanity.

Not only does it deny the corporate claim to liberty of men and women organized in national societies, but it refuses the much more

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

fundamental claim of men and women to the free expression of human personality, which rests upon the eternal value of every human soul. True pride of race may be tested by the behaviour of its possessors towards their own fellow citizens and towards others. It will forbid conduct to individuals of which they should be ashamed in their private lives. It is thus evidently something far removed from the ideal of a race which by the German philosophy of to-day is called to stamp out the civilization of another. Between these two conceptions there is a great gulf fixed. The German race, under its present rulers, is betraying both itself and the greater whole of which it is part, and to whose progress it might, and ought to, be making its own distinctive contribution. And the real tragedy of that betrayal, as it affects the German youth, is the enlistment of the honourable instincts of self-sacrifice and devotion in the service of a crudely materialist philosophy. Until these false creeds are abjured, and replaced by a wider toleration, they must continue to excite resistance. The future of humanity must not be left in the hands of those who would imprison and enslave it.

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

We may readily admit that we like other men have often fallen short of our professions. Our history has not been free from faults, it has taken time to establish in universal practice principles which have now won general acceptance. And there are things today within our body politic which we need to fight not less intensely, if with other weapons, than we fight the enemy without. But the broad record of the British race stands to be judged on facts that are incontestable. It is the fact that during the nineteenth century, when the power of this country was unchallenged, there was no nation in Europe that felt for that reason insecure, or that did not recognize our power to be an instrument of peace. The *Pax Britannica* has been no empty or self-righteous boast of purpose. It is the fact, too, that in every corner of the world where men of British race have established influence, there by immutable law of nature you find established the seed and plant of liberty. It is the trail by which is marked their progress, interpreted to all by the standards of good faith, respect for law, and equal justice. Most truly, therefore, of our people was it said:

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

'Their country's cause is the high cause of Freedom and Honour. That fairest earthly fame, the fame of Freedom, is inseparable from the names of Albion, Britain, England.'

My message, therefore, to you today as Chancellor and Foreign Secretary is to be so proud of the race to which you belong that you will be as jealous of its honour as you are of its safety, and that you will fight for both with equal determination. The struggle will be arduous, it may be long, and it will certainly demand of our nation that it should withhold nothing that may contribute to our strength. Let us never forget that of all the resources at our command, the most powerful will be the quality of our resolution, fed by a true perception of the responsibility laid upon each one of us, and of the spirit in which that responsibility must be discharged.

In front of the Viceroy's House in New Delhi stands a column, on which are inscribed the words:

In Thought Faith
In Word Wisdom
In Deed Courage
In Life Service
So may India be great.

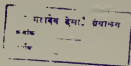
श्री महादेव देवाय प्रणामः

कर्मका

कर्मका

THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERTY

No one of us could offer for our country and our Commonwealth any better prayer today.



श्री महादेव देवाई कंगारु

कर्मिक _____

सर्गांक _____

२३

५४ ५९

PRINTED BY SHRI
AT THE WISHTY PRESS AND PUBLISHING HOUSE
MUMBAI CITY

OXFORD PAMPHLETS ON WORLD AFFAIRS

3d. each

More than a million copies of these short, authoritative pamphlets had been sold in the first six months after publication. Twenty-six titles are now (April 1966) available in India, and additions are made regularly. An up-to-date list will gladly be sent on application to

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

**Hicot Road
BOMBAY**

**Mount Road
MADRAS**

**Lal Bazar
CALCUTTA**